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## ***FOREWORD***

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The Medical Examiner's Office serves the living by investigating sudden, violent, unexpected, and suspicious deaths. The Division's staff recognizes the tragedy surrounding an untimely death and performs its investigations, in part, to assist the grieving family. A complete investigation provides for the expeditious settling of insurance claims and estates, as well as for implementing civil and criminal actions. Questions which seem irrelevant in the initial hours after death can become significant in the following months. The surviving family, friends, and general public should have the assurance that a complete investigation was conducted.

When a death occurs on the job or is work related, the results of our investigation are immediately forwarded to the State Department of Labor and Industry so that the family can gain full benefit of our findings. Private insurance companies also routinely use these findings to settle claims. Whenever a consumer product is implicated in a death, we notify the Consumer Product Safety Commission to ensure that the product is studied and the necessary steps are taken to protect the public. The public health dimension of the Medical Examiner's function is designed to isolate and identify causes of sudden, unexpected death. When an infectious agent or poison is implicated in a death, the family and contacts of the deceased are notified in order that they might receive any needed medical treatment.

The medical investigation of violent death is frequently required in civil or criminal adjudication. Thus, a prompt medical investigation is conducted to provide the criminal justice system with medical information and evidence required for adjudication. Although criminal death investigations constitute a small portion of deaths investigated by the Medical Examiner, these deaths are studied in great detail because of the issues and legal consequences involved. In this way, the criminal justice system is offered the best support that medical science can provide.



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*DESCRIPTION AND PURPOSE*  
*Of the*  
*Seattle-King County Department of Public Health*  
*King County Medical Examiner's Office*

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With the adoption of the Home Rule Charter in 1969, the King County Office of Coroner was abolished and replaced by that of the Medical Examiner. The Medical Examiner's Office is part of the Prevention Division of the Seattle-King County Department of Public Health. Although the Department is a combined City-County department, this Office is funded by the County and is under the King County Executive.

The Chief Medical Examiner is a physician trained and certified in Forensic Pathology, the branch of medicine concerned with the investigation of sudden and unexpected, violent or suspicious deaths. Three Sections are under the Chief Medical Examiner's direction: Scene Investigation, Autopsy Support and Administrative Support. These duties include field investigation of scene and circumstances of death, identification of the deceased, performance of autopsies where indicated, certification of death, notification of next-of-kin, and control and disposition of personal property of the deceased.

Deaths which come under the jurisdiction of the Medical Examiner are defined by state statute (RCW 68.50) and include but are not limited to the following circumstances:

1. Persons who die suddenly when in apparent good health and without medical attendance within thirty-six hours preceding death.
2. Circumstances which indicate death was caused in part or entirely by unnatural or unlawful means.
3. Suspicious circumstances.
4. Unknown or obscure causes.
5. Deaths caused by any violence whatsoever, whether the primary cause or any contributory factors in the death.
6. Contagious disease.
7. Unclaimed bodies.

